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Chairman: Mr. KUKAN (Slovakia)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/48/12 and A/48/12/Add.1)

1. Mr. MUHAMMAD (Malaysia) applauded the determination of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to confront the difficult multidimensional nature of the refugee problem. The most viable solution to the problem was to prevent the crises from occurring. There was an urgent need for the United Nations to develop an early-warning capability that could be combined effectively with its peacemaking and peace-keeping functions to prevent crises. In that connection, it was imperative that UNHCR should concentrate on developing its strategy for preventing the refugee problem, which would require maintaining close coordination between UNHCR, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the Secretary-General and the countries affected.

2. When preventive measures failed, the few durable solutions that could be applied were resettlement, settlement in place and repatriation. Of those, voluntary repatriation was perhaps the best solution. However, it was possible that refugees might refuse to return to their homeland because conditions there had not improved, in which case settlement in place and resettlement in third countries would become the preferred solutions. However, the country of first destination could be a developing country whose own difficulties prevented it from supporting settlement in place. On the other hand, the richest countries were showing ever-greater unwillingness to accept refugees. In the circumstances, voluntary repatriation was the most realistic option. Countries of origin should live up to their obligation to take back their own people.

3. He expressed Malaysia's gratitude to UNHCR for its efforts to protect and assist refugees and facilitate their reintegration in their own country, as in the case of Cambodia. He noted with satisfaction that UNHCR was establishing strong links with development agencies and working for the economic reconstruction of countries devastated by war.

4. It was encouraging that in recent years UNHCR had adopted a holistic approach to the question of refugees and displaced persons. He welcomed the establishment of the Field Safety Coordination Unit and the security measures adopted to ensure the safety of UNHCR personnel in the field.

5. He stressed the need to distinguish clearly between refugees and economic immigrants. The Malaysian Government regarded it as its first responsibility to provide adequate living standards for its own people. It had therefore decided not to accept illegal economic immigrants. Nevertheless, the "boat people" who were still in the country remained under the Government's protection until their future was decided. An effort was being made to secure the voluntary repatriation of those classified as illegal immigrants or their resettlement in third countries. He stressed that the programme had been slowed down considerably owing to "double screening" by third countries and called on the countries concerned to stop that practice.

(Mr. Muhammad, Malaysia)

6. Malaysia welcomed the decision of UNHCR to strengthen its emergency preparedness and response capacity and expressed appreciation of its efforts to increase the capacity of the United Nations as a whole to respond to refugee crises. In conclusion, he drew attention to the need to delineate the mandates of UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs clearly. His delegation was cognizant of the severe financial difficulties facing the United Nations and therefore warned against duplication of effort. UNHCR should remember that its first obligation was to provide assistance and protection to refugees.

7. Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) said it was generally held that the most appropriate solution to the refugee problem was their repatriation in conditions of safety. Canada agreed that the problem of refugees would be solved by preventing displacement, protecting the people who fled their homes and providing durable solutions. The role of sustainable development in preventing migration flows was gaining wide recognition. In that connection, he recalled that the International Conference on Population and Development had recognized the relationship between migration and development by including the subject in its agenda.

8. Although repatriation and local integration were the preferred response to refugee situations, a small proportion of refugees would require third country resettlement. However, the growing abuse of systems for determining refugee status was jeopardizing opportunities for resettlement. His country supported the international efforts to speed up the granting of refugee status where warranted. Canadian legislation had recently been amended to expedite those processes and control abuses.

9. Protection strategies must be designed to meet the special needs of particular groups. He emphasized that Canada continued to be concerned about the situation of vulnerable refugees, especially women and children. Accordingly, guidelines had been established to improve protection for women taking into account the specific conditions in their country of origin; for example, sexual violence could be regarded as constituting persecution. He noted with satisfaction that some of the measures proposed by Canada in that connection had been incorporated in the conclusions of the Executive Committee.

10. Canada noted with appreciation the role of UNHCR in taking steps to assist women who had been victims of violence in the former Yugoslavia and was in favour of retaining the function of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women.

11. Canada, which had resettled over 650,000 refugees in its territory since the end of the Second World War, noted that the refugee problem would be more easily solved if activities were based on sustained cooperation with the agencies concerned, both inside and outside the United Nations system, in particular the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. In conclusion, he expressed his country's concern about the capacity of UNHCR continually to extend its responsibility for vulnerable groups such as the internally displaced.

12. Mr. HUSLID (Norway) said that, although in the past year new refugee problems had arisen, some refugees had been able to return home. Several regions, however, were still characterized by war, ethnic conflicts and systematic violations of human rights.

(Mr. Huslid, Norway)

13. The hope for peace in the world was constantly being tested by the atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the time had come to end that situation. The high degree of violence prevailing in situations of that kind hampered the provision of humanitarian aid; actions that endangered the delivery of protection and assistance or put the security of international staff and other relief workers at risk must be strongly condemned. Strict adherence to international instruments and relevant resolutions of the Security Council was imperative.

14. The three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions had enjoyed broad support at the meeting of the Executive Committee. Norway considered that approach increasingly pertinent as a framework for concerted international action with regard to refugees and displaced persons. It hoped that the General Assembly would reaffirm its strong support for the work of UNHCR.

15. Questions of refuge and displacement had come to the forefront of the international political agenda. Norway shared the concern of the High Commissioner regarding the need for comprehensive regional arrangements encompassing questions of asylum, protection and migration. The principle of non-refoulement was a cornerstone of international refugee law, and Norway considered that measures to curb the abuse of asylum could be implemented without jeopardizing that principle.

16. The Norwegian Government was pleased with the systematic collaboration between the competent bodies of the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as with the establishment of the UNHCR/NGO Partnership in Action, and was confident that after the global conference in Oslo, there would be improved cooperation among all the organizations concerned.

17. As the High Commissioner had pointed out, the best solution to refugee problems was to prevent them from occurring. Norway applauded the efforts of UNHCR to advocate an integrated approach by the international community to peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building operations. It was necessary to go to the root of conflicts and show the political will to find durable solutions.

18. Human-rights violations were at the core of many refugee situations and internal displacement. The internally displaced also needed protection, assistance and solutions. The Norwegian Government firmly supported including displaced persons in the High Commissioner's mandate. In that connection also, it was important to have the cooperation of other international agencies and of the international community.

19. Given the increase in the number of refugees, voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity remained the best solution. Countries of origin must resume their responsibility for safeguarding the rights of their peoples. An international presence in the country of origin was becoming an essential feature of the strategy of UNHCR, which had a leading role to play in mobilizing international action and the return of refugees to their country.

(Mr. Huslid, Norway)

20. The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had shown that the gap between immediate reintegration needs, attempts at reconciliation and long-term recovery could be bridged; in the formulation of assistance activities, the traditional distinctions between refugees, returnees and affected population had been overcome. Norway was keenly interested in the application of that approach to the situation in Mozambique.

21. The financial resources available were limited, and countries hosting large refugee communities must be relieved of at least part of their burden. As one of the major contributors to UNHCR programmes, Norway would continue to support the programmes of the High Commissioner's Office in general and its role in the former Yugoslavia in particular. Norway had maintained high contributions to UNHCR, thus showing its commitment to that principle. Norway's contribution had risen from $22 million in 1992 to $35 million in 1993. Most of that assistance would be channelled through UNHCR.

22. In conclusion, he paid a tribute to the staff of UNHCR and emphasized that the safety and security of humanitarian staff in situations of conflict must be respected.

23. Mr. OULIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that wars and underdevelopment had made the refugee problem a permanent item. Peaceful solutions must be found to disputes and the foundations laid for development activities. Support for political initiatives to prevent refugee flows and immediate responses to emergency situations would secure regional peace and stability. In addition, cooperation among international and national agencies, as well as humanitarian non-governmental organizations, would be conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

24. During the past 14 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran had been confronted with severe economic and development difficulties and the unprecedented influx of refugees had seriously curtailed its effort to cope with those challenges. Despite the voluntary repatriation of more than 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees, his country was still host to more than 2.5 million refugees and remained the primary receiving country in the world. Since international assistance to meet the needs of the refugees had been minimal, the Islamic Republic of Iran had had to use its own national resources. It was to be hoped that henceforward it would receive sufficient international, humanitarian and financial aid.

25. The Tripartite Commission, made up of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR, was concerned with the large-scale operation of the spontaneous return of Afghan refugees. WFP and the International Organization for Migration were cooperating in that effort. The refugees were to receive assistance packages before their departure, but owing to the insufficiency of international allocations less than half of the 850,000 Afghan returnees had received such assistance at the borders. Assistance to the remaining Afghan refugees must therefore be continued and increased.

26. According to a timetable agreed to by the three parties, all Afghan refugees were expected to return home by mid-1995; however, the lack of socio-economic infrastructure in Afghanistan could be the major obstacle to

(Mr. Oulia, Islamic Republic of Iran)

repatriation, a fact that had been emphasized by the High Commissioner. The operation must also encompass development-oriented cooperation within the United Nations system, as well as assistance from the humanitarian non-governmental organizations aimed at reconstruction of Afghanistan.

27. Following the return to Iraq of over 1 million Iraqi refugees by the end of 1992, nearly 300,000 more had left the Islamic Republic of Iran voluntarily in 1993. The remaining Iraqi refugees now numbered 700,000, the second largest refugee population in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

28. From the earliest stages of the dispute in Azerbaijan, Iranian diplomacy had endeavoured to prevent yet another human tragedy. Following the deterioration of the situation, and at the request of the Government of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran had set up several encampments inside Azerbaijani territory. So far, about 100,000 Azerbaijani displaced persons had been transferred to those encampments; the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the only donor country, had extended all kinds of humanitarian assistance to them.

29. There was an urgent need to complete the settlement facilities before winter, and for the competent United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to be involved in the relief operations. The Islamic Republic of Iran once again announced its readiness to facilitate the transit of international aid to Azerbaijani displaced persons.

30. Enhancement of international assistance to refugees, displaced persons and returnees, as well as comprehensive implementation of UNHCR's three-pronged strategy, necessitated a pragmatic and fair approach to new problems that were arising. The plight of Palestinian and Bosnian refugees served as examples of the failure to address the root causes of their problems, and demonstrated the unquestionable need for a revised approach.

31. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that there were about 19 million refugees in the world today; that figure alone spoke of the dimension and urgency of the issue. The international community had the responsibility to meet the needs of refugees for food, clothing, shelter and medicines, and more importantly to ensure their return to their homes in safety and dignity.

32. Regrettably, temporary arrangements often tended to be prolonged indefinitely; as a result, the refugee population languished in the camps in total uncertainty as to their future. That had been so in the case of the Palestinians, although the recent Declaration of Principles signed by the PLO and Israel offered hope that many of them would at last be able to return to their homeland.

33. For close to three years now, Bangladesh had been hosting over a quarter million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. His Government, to the best of its ability, and with assistance from the international community, had been providing for the refugees; however, it could not afford to do so indefinitely owing to the strain on its socio-economic and administrative infrastructures, on the environment and on the local population. In April 1992, it had therefore reached an agreement with the Government of Myanmar for their repatriation.

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

34. To date, about 44,000 refugees had returned voluntarily to Myanmar, and Bangladesh hoped that the Government of Myanmar would further intensify confidence-building measures, such as the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR, so that many other refugees might also return.

35. Along with the global surge of democratic reform, atrocities of the worst kind were now being committed against humanity in the new republics of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and in other regions of the world. The most glaring instance of that situation was the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where millions - particularly the Muslims, who were not being offered asylum by other countries or receiving the promised humanitarian aid - were victims of the perpetrators of so-called ethnic cleansing. The situation was untenable and must be reversed. The problem of Somalia had also accentuated the global refugee crisis.

36. The United Nations system must infuse more vigour into the coordination of emergency assistance and the rehabilitation of refugees. Coordination of humanitarian activities with peacemaking and peace-keeping measures was important. UNHCR and other bodies and agencies, such as UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, WHO and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as non-governmental organizations concerned with refugee issues, could complement each other in those efforts. The need for a political solution to the conflicts must not be forgotten, however.

37. Regarding the refugees who were categorized as fleeing from the poverty of the so-called third world, he said that the international community must address the issues of poverty and underdevelopment. Mankind, which was no longer divided by ideological barriers, was now united on the principles of democracy and human rights. It must therefore demonstrate that unity by alleviating human suffering and giving priority to the refugee issue.

38. Mr. KOVANDA (Czech Republic) said that the existence of 19 million refugees in the world attested to the essential role played by UNHCR in providing international protection for refugees, safeguarding their right to asylum, ensuring their safety in the asylum States, and providing assistance for their voluntary repatriation.

39. Since one of the main reasons why people sought protection abroad was the massive violation of human rights in their own country, the international community should deal with the issue of States' responsibility for generating conditions that led to refugee flows and the need for host countries to guarantee respect for human rights.

40. The Czech Republic provided protection for all refugees and displaced persons, without distinction, and did not permit them to be expelled to countries where they might be deprived of their personal freedom. Between May 1992 and September 1993, humanitarian centres in the Czech Republic had provided asylum to approximately 4,500 persons; the most recent data indicated that there were 18,000 asylum-seekers being accommodated in the centres, including 600 former concentration camp prisoners and members of their families. At the same time, his country had been preparing an integration programme for

(Mr. Kovanda, Czech Republic)

those who would not be able to return to their home country or leave for third countries.

41. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Europe had been hit by the largest refugee flow since the Second World War. Some of those refugees travelled through Central Europe and the Czech Republic in particular. Since the entry into force of the new asylum laws in Germany, many refugees had decided to stay in the Czech Republic, which had changed from a transit country to a country of destination. Most of them had left their home countries for purely economic reasons and did not meet the criteria for the granting of refugee status. Therefore, despite its opposition to any measure that would go against the right to seek asylum, the Czech Republic had introduced stricter protection of borders and a visa requirement.

42. The United Nations should play a more active role in monitoring situations which might lead to mass refugee waves, in adopting measures to prevent them and in coordinating international assistance to refugees. Therefore, his delegation supported the establishment of an international early-warning system and preventive efforts by the international community aimed at political stability, implementing human rights, resolving the problems of ethnic minorities and establishing conditions favourable to refugees' voluntary return to their homeland or their integration in the region of the host country.

43. His country had established close working contacts with UNHCR, which was entitled to participate in the asylum procedure at any stage. The Czech Republic continued to participate in international humanitarian assistance to refugees in the former Yugoslavia, and his delegation would be announcing its voluntary contributions to the UNHCR programmes for 1994 later in the week.

44. Mr. SIRELKHATIM (Sudan) said that his country would do its utmost to implement all phases of the strategy put forward by UNHCR to meet its goals, and it called on the international community to cooperate with UNHCR in providing the funds required for implementing its programmes.

45. The Sudan, which despite its economic difficulties had hosted more than 1 million refugees over the last three decades, had concluded a tripartite agreement with Ethiopia and UNHCR that had paved the way for voluntary repatriation of 13,000 Ethiopian refugees. That was an example of the strategy advocated by UNHCR of coordinating voluntary repatriation programmes with the relevant United Nations resettlement programmes.

46. Regarding the repatriation of the Eritrean refugees, his delegation shared the High Commissioner's disappointment at the lack of positive results, despite a pledging conference held in the first week of July and the efforts of the Eritrean Government and the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs in preparing resettlement programmes in coordination with the different United Nations bodies, including UNHCR.

47. In connection with voluntary repatriation, consideration should be given to the post-repatriation period in the countries that had hosted refugees for lengthy periods. The international community should try to mitigate the negative impact of the refugee presence. He commended UNHCR policies aimed at

(Mr. Sirelkhatim, Sudan)

rehabilitating the environment in those countries that had been negatively affected by refugees and the appointment of a Senior Environmental Coordinator. He called on the international community to pay more attention to the environmental rehabilitation programmes by providing adequate funds; the work plan mentioned in the UNHCR report represented a scientific solution to that problem.

48. Concerning the displaced persons, his delegation supported the UNHCR strategy of remedying the root causes of displacements, in the framework of the High Commissioner's statement to the forty-fourth session of the Executive Committee based on the sovereignty of States. However, it hoped that that would not be done at the expense of its original mandate of protecting and helping the refugees. It welcomed the High Commissioner's repeated statements that she did not intend to extend her mandate to cover the internally displaced.

49. With the spread of areas of conflict in different parts of the world and the consequent outflow of refugees and displaced persons, some developed countries had begun to limit the granting of asylum because of the difficulty of clearly distinguishing economic immigrants from political refugees. It was important to try to solve the question of economic immigration without undermining the right of refuge. In his delegation's view, humanitarian considerations should take precedence over economic considerations.

50. As for a comprehensive strategy for the Horn of Africa, his delegation welcomed any initiative calling for more attention to the question and believed that solutions to the problem should reflect the actual situation in the Horn region rather than that of other regions. The policies of the countries in the region on humanitarian issues reached at the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Countries of the Horn of Africa, held at Addis Ababa in April 1992, should not be overlooked, and the best framework for making that strategy a reality would be a special conference for the countries of the region to be convened under the auspices of UNHCR.

51. Turning to the issue of Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries as one of the negative repercussions of the armed discord in southern Sudan, he reiterated his Government's deep belief in the peaceful solution of the strife. The Government of the Sudan had unflinchingly sought solutions to that problem: it had expanded safe havens in southern Sudan and resettled thousands of Sudanese in their home regions. Thanks to cooperation with the United Nations, humanitarian assistance continued to be delivered to the affected areas controlled by the rebels. The Sudan was prepared to continue cooperating with the United Nations in order to bring about peace in the region. It called on all States to create an atmosphere conducive to the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace and hoped that cooperation with UNHCR and the neighbouring countries would lead to the solution to the problem of the Sudanese refugees in those countries.

52. Mr. BOREL (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the plight of people displaced within their countries was one of the main humanitarian problems of the times. Many conflicts were internal, and civilians were inevitably the principal victims. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) protected and assisted victims of armed conflicts and internal

(Mr. Borel)

disturbances, devoting more than 80 per cent of its budget to activities on behalf of civilian populations and displaced persons in particular. Those activities included emergency assistance, which combined medical assistance, food aid and rehabilitation, and helped civilians to stay in their places of residence, thus preventing mass population flights. Wherever necessary, ICRC set up reception centres and camps, sent delegates to sensitive areas, housed displaced persons and visited places of detention.

53. ICRC, by virtue of its mandate, was required to be present in all theatres of war and to bring assistance to all victims of armed conflict, whether displaced persons or not. In many situations, it worked alongside other humanitarian organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

54. ICRC, in keeping with the task of working for the faithful application of international humanitarian law entrusted to it by the States, collaborated with Governments and other parties to conflicts to ensure respect for the law. In situations of internal armed conflict, it based its action on article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. ICRC also invoked Additional Protocol II (1977) to the Conventions, whenever it applied.

55. Proper application of humanitarian law would reduce the flight of people from their homes in times of armed conflict. Compliance with the obligation to accept humanitarian assistance for conflict victims would also result in fewer people leaving their places of residence. It was necessary, therefore, to reaffirm the rules of international humanitarian law, for they provided answers to the complex issues arising from situations of conflict.

56. At the recent International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, held in Geneva, 160 States had adopted a declaration by consensus stating their determination to ensure the effectiveness of international humanitarian law and to take resolute action against States that violated that law. ICRC hoped that States would take the necessary measures, both nationally and internationally, to ensure that their renewed commitment brought tangible results in the area of respect for humanitarian law.

57. The effectiveness and credibility of humanitarian action and its acceptance by belligerents depended on its being impartial. Consequently, a clear distinction must be made between the role of peace-keeping and peacemaking operations and that of humanitarian organizations. It was becoming increasingly obvious that humanitarian organizations, whose primary concern was to provide assistance to victims, must preserve their independence and neutrality.

58. Mr. KASOULIDES (Cyprus) said that his country, which had long benefited from the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was aware of the urgent need to protect and assist the vast number of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world. UNHCR, ICRC and other relevant non-governmental organizations, through their untiring efforts, were alleviating suffering, but they were overwhelmed by the magnitude of their task.

59. There had been some positive political developments that had resulted in a reduction in the number of refugees. In Cambodia, Afghanistan and Mozambique,

(Mr. Kasoulides, Cyprus)

millions had returned to their native land. Voluntary repatriation of refugees was the ideal solution, but it must be accompanied by reintegration into society under acceptable economic and political conditions, with continuous surveillance of the returnees' welfare.

60. A better understanding of the underlying causes of such a mass exodus ought to make it possible to prevent the uprooting of millions of people and the imposing of an unbearable burden on developing countries with scant resources. Even developed countries with an honourable tradition of providing asylum were being suffocated by the endless flood of refugees. UNHCR must be given all the necessary assistance to expand its preventive functions.

61. As prevention was the best cure, it was essential to strengthen United Nations mechanisms and procedures for averting conflicts, negotiating solutions and improving human rights conditions globally. Increased cooperation between UNHCR and human rights bodies should be encouraged. The international community should intensify its efforts to resolve the conflicts that gave rise to floods of refugees and create a favourable climate for the voluntary repatriation of refugees in safety and dignity. Cyprus strongly believed that national sovereignty should not be used as a justification for depriving internally displaced persons of international assistance.

62. Cyprus supported the emergency preparedness and response mechanism adopted by UNHCR for such situations. It also welcomed the attention focused on refugee women and children and supported the adoption of special measures for their protection.

63. There currently existed massive flows of emigrants leaving their countries owing to economic causes that did not come under the definition of refugees given in the 1951 Convention. The issue of abuse of asylum was very sensitive for many countries and the United Nations should evaluate its international repercussions. His delegation believed that the United Nations should study more closely the question of internally displaced persons and pointed out that it would be useful to distinguish between persons internally displaced owing to developments occurring within a country and those displaced from parts of their country owing to external interference and occupation.

64. In that connection, he recalled that, during the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey in 1974 and the subsequent occupation of 37 per cent of its territory, approximately a third of the inhabitants of the occupied area had been forcibly expelled from their homes and transferred to areas controlled by the Government. Such massive transfer of population was a gross violation of international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. In Cyprus, nevertheless, not only were the occupying forces still present 19 years later, but many properties in the occupied zone had been given to persons illegally brought in from Turkey and settled in large numbers in an attempt to alter the demographic structure of the occupied territory. An estimated 85,000 settlers were currently resident in Cyprus, as compared with approximately 100,000 indigenous Turkish Cypriots.

65. Those facts had been confirmed during a Council of Europe fact-finding mission to Cyprus and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council had adopted

(Mr. Kasoulides, Cyprus)

recommendation 1197 (1992), which made clear reference to the deliberate and systematic attempt to alter the demographic structure of the Republic of Cyprus by introducing Turkish settlers. That information had been corroborated by a recent study of two German professors, according to which there had been a 40 to 48 per cent population increase in northern Cyprus between 1974 and 1990, an incredible increase for even the most fertile population.

66. The Secretary-General, recognizing the urgent needs that existed in that area, continued to use the special UNHCR mission in Cyprus to coordinate relief measures. Cyprus was deeply grateful for the efforts of donor countries, the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and UNHCR. The right of all displaced persons to return to their homes was a sine qua non for the resolution of the problem of Cyprus on a just and lasting basis. Cyprus still hoped that the mission of good offices entrusted to the Secretary-General by the Security Council and the adoption of confidence-building measures would lead to such a solution.

67. Mr. MATESIC (Croatia), reviewing some of the main problems of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world, especially in Africa, the Trans-Caucasian Republics and Central Asia, and also the encouraging progress made in Cambodia, Central America and Mozambique, said that his Government commended the efforts to resolve the problems made by the High Commissioner for Refugees.

68. The policy of ethnic cleansing pursued by the Yugoslav Army and Serbian paramilitary forces during their aggression against Croatia, which had resulted in the occupation of approximately 25 per cent of the territory of the Republic, had left a total of about 275,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and about 250,000 displaced Croatian nationals.

69. His Government had received humanitarian aid from UNHCR, the European Community, the United States and IGATHA, an international Islamic humanitarian organization. The problem of refugees and displaced persons was magnified by the fact that 78 per cent of them were housed in private homes. In addition, a significant decrease in humanitarian aid made it possible to cover only about 30 per cent of those individuals' subsistence needs.

70. The world community had unfortunately attempted only to alleviate the consequences of the situation and not to address its causes, with the result that the problem had reached tremendous proportions and the effort to solve it would require much greater resources than would have been the case if there had been an immediate and resolute response to the aggression during its early stages.

71. Since the international community had chosen not to use military means to enforce the relevant Security Council resolutions, the least that could be done was to maintain sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro until they halted their aggression and allowed the refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes.

72. Mr. SOTIROV (Bulgaria) said that his Government had a high opinion of the dedicated work of UNHCR and appreciated the results already achieved in

(Mr. Sotirov, Bulgaria)

developing an integrated response to the problems of refugees, by linking humanitarian action and protection of human rights with peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building. In that respect, it fully shared the view that it was necessary to mobilize all governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental efforts on bilateral, regional and global levels.

73. Bulgaria considered it very important to strengthen its cooperation with UNHCR. Thus, Bulgaria had acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. At the request of his Government, a liaison office with UNHCR had been established in Sofia. Training programmes and seminars for officials dealing with refugee matters were being conducted. Bulgaria appreciated the advice provided by UNHCR in drawing up a draft refugee act.

74. It was crucial to set up the necessary mechanism to review requests for asylum, and thus a national bureau had been established to determine the status of refugees and to coordinate inter-agency implementation of the relevant international instruments.

75. His country was seriously concerned by the deteriorating refugee situation in the region and by the prospect of a mass flow of refugees into Bulgaria. It accepted the principle of burden-sharing adopted by the London Conference on the former Yugoslavia, but within available resources. Given its economic situation, his country required increased financial assistance from UNHCR. Assistance should be provided not only to the countries of Central Europe but also to other States neighbouring on the former Yugoslavia.

76. The complexity of population displacements was affecting the application of the principle of non-refoulement. The application of the concepts of first country of asylum and third host country was a matter of concern. The implementation of the latter notion was already placing heavy and even intolerable pressure on the still fragile refugee protection systems of some Central and Eastern European States.

77. Mr. CALOVSKI (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and her statements before the Committee were most discouraging, indicating as they had that the number of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world was constantly rising and that there had been very little progress in solving the root causes of the refugee and displaced persons crisis. The international community had the obligation to assist all refugees, without discrimination.

78. Owing to the war in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thousands of refugees had fled to his country, which was assisting them despite its limited resources.

79. Prevention was the best solution to the refugee problem. The international community and the United Nations in particular should develop preventive activities on a much larger scale and in a more organized way. Following the cold war, a climate of security, peace and cooperation had to be created throughout the world, making it possible to solve conflicts by peaceful means and to promote economic and social development and the enjoyment of human

(Mr. Calovski, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

rights. His Government fully supported the Partnership in Action process and believed that the main requirement was to increase the overall capacity for assistance and eliminate any waste of resources.

80. The refugee problem in regions in armed conflict, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, took on a tragic dimension because of the continuous violations of humanitarian law and the daily difficulty in delivering humanitarian assistance. The time had come for the international community and the United Nations to take a stronger position on the violation of humanitarian law and a clearer stand on whether the provision of assistance violated the Charter principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States. The right to assistance was becoming of paramount importance in international relations and the question must be addressed without delay.

81. Mr. APPAVE (Australia) said that the number of refugees and displaced persons in the world had increased alarmingly in the past 20 years, a situation that became even more daunting if account was taken of the fact that refugee movements were frequently part of mass population displacements triggered by extraordinarily complex causes. Persecution, violations of human rights, armed conflict and ethnic religious intolerance all contributed significantly to the problem, but natural or man-made disasters and economic motivations should also not be overlooked.

82. UNHCR had a central role to play in providing international protection and assistance to those in need, and it must maintain a clear vision of its humanitarian mission. His delegation supported the strategy outlined in the High Commissioner's opening statement in the Executive Committee in which she had defended the principle of asylum and referred to a search for durable solutions and the exploration of new preventive approaches.

83. It was extremely important that the prime function of UNHCR to provide international protection for those who were persecuted should be extended to related categories of need. Australia welcomed the underpinning of the whole programme by improved financial management practices, including greater emphasis on performance evaluation and efficiency.

84. Clearly, for the strategy to be successful, UNHCR should develop strong links with the humanitarian organizations. It was only through close interaction with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, with the voluntary sector and with Governments that UNHCR would be able to carry out effectively its function of responding to contemporary needs. Australia would do everything within its power to provide such cooperation.

85. Ms. HORIUCHI (Japan) said that, as the Secretary-General had noted in his report on the work of the Organization (A/48/1), the range of responsibilities facing the new United Nations was virtually open-ended, and the United Nations must address its challenges in the most coherent and comprehensive way possible. That was certainly true in the case of refugees. Since 1991, the number of refugees in the world had risen to 19 million. In such circumstances, it was remarkable that UNHCR had achieved such positive results.

(Ms. Horiuchi, Japan)

86. Her delegation considered that the basic strategy of UNHCR, which emphasized prevention, preparedness and solutions, was in keeping with the principles embodied in the Agenda for Peace and that, in order to carry out that strategy, UNHCR must have the full cooperation of other United Nations organs such as UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and WHO, and it must coordinate its activities with them.

87. In Asia, the Comprehensive Plan of Action, initiated at the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees in 1989, had been successfully completed and more than 370,000 refugees had returned to Cambodia. Moreover, UNHCR and the Government of Myanmar would soon sign a memorandum of understanding, which would pave the way for the safe and voluntary return of the refugees in Bangladesh.

88. In Africa, there had been notable progress: since the signing of the peace agreement in October 1992, more than 35,000 Mozambicans had returned to their country, most of them at their own initiative; similar operations had been organized in Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Zambia. It was encouraging that an agreement signed with the Government of South Africa would give UNHCR access to Mozambican refugees in that country.

89. In the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR was facing perhaps the most difficult task in its history. In other areas, such as Burundi, Liberia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, emergencies had recently occurred.

90. Internally displaced persons posed another problem for UNHCR, since the Office's mandate in that area was not clear. Her delegation was opposed to the duplication of work and the unlimited expansion of the mandates of United Nations organs and believed that, in certain circumstances, assistance needs should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

91. Her delegation was concerned about the security of personnel engaged in humanitarian activities such as those of UNHCR, and believed that all possible measures must be taken to guarantee their well-being, while at the same time ensuring that their activities remained non-partisan. Likewise, the supply routes used by UNHCR must be afforded better protection so that they reached those for whom they were intended.

92. Mr. ALVAREZ (Venezuela) said that his delegation was pleased at the voluntary repatriation of hundreds of thousands of people, which was putting an end to prolonged refugee crises, and reiterated its commitment to the international instruments for the protection of refugees, such as the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol as well as the resolutions of the World Conference on Human Rights, which had recently been held in Vienna.

93. His delegation was concerned about the increasing numerical and geographical dimensions of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the Balkans, Africa, Asia, some former Soviet republics and Haiti. UNHCR was dealing with that problem through its triple strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions.

94. In Latin America, the role of the International Conference on Central American Refugees was also worthy of mention. The problem of Central American

(Mr. Alvarez, Venezuela)

refugees required not only a broad and integrated response but also improved cooperation in order to deal with the humanitarian, economic, political and security dimensions of the crisis.

95. In addition to the flows of refugees caused by persecution, mass violations of human rights, and conflicts, waves of migrants were leaving their countries of origin in search of better living conditions. That situation called for concerted efforts to create the necessary conditions for coexistence and development.

96. His delegation commended the efforts of UNHCR to promote and disseminate legislation and principles dealing with the protection of refugees. Such activities should be expanded and strengthened with the support of States and governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in human rights and international humanitarian law.

97. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, referred to the comments made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the question of refugees and said that what had occurred in Iraq had been due to foreign intervention and activities incompatible with good-neighbourly relations. In spite of its difficult circumstances, Iraq had provided shelter for a large number of Iranian refugees, and it rejected the use of humanitarian issues for political purposes. Iraq would spare no efforts to facilitate the return of all persons who had been forced to leave their country because of their activities.

98. Mr. DRAKAKIS (Greece), speaking in exercise of the right of reply and addressing the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that that State had been admitted to membership in the United Nations in accordance with Security Council resolution 817 (1993), which stipulated that the State would be "referred to for all purposes within the United Nations as 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' pending settlement of the difference that has arisen over the name of the State". That difference had not yet been resolved.

99. Mr. OULIA (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that in his statement he had deliberately avoided linking the purely humanitarian question of refugees with political considerations. While his delegation categorically rejected the accusations of the representative of Iraq, it preferred to adhere to its original intention and try to keep humanitarian and political issues separate. The Islamic Republic of Iran was prepared to discuss the problem of refugees with the Iraqi authorities at a time agreed by the two sides in the near future.

100. Mr. CALOVSKI (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, if the differences between his country and Greece had not yet been resolved, his country was not to blame. With respect to the name used in Security Council resolution 817 (1993), he noted that, in conformity with that resolution, he could make use of his country's constitutional designation, namely, the Republic of Macedonia, and he would do so. If his interpretation was wrong, he hoped that the Office of Legal Affairs would correct him. The representative of Greece should use the

(Mr. Calovski, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

constitutional designation but, if it wished to use the name mentioned in the resolution, it could do so. His delegation hoped that in future the differences between the two countries would be resolved.

101. Mr. DRAKAKIS (Greece), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it was not a question of interpreting Security Council resolution 817 (1993). If it could be inferred from the interpretation of the resolution that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could use another name, the resolution would be meaningless. In accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council was the only body competent to settle disputes, and that body had already given its opinion on the question in the relevant resolution.

102. Mr. CALOVSKI (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations was fully competent to interpret the resolutions of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.